

General Law Committee
Public Testimony
February 23, 2023
Testimony in Support of: HB 5434

Good morning Chairmen Maroney and D'Agostino, Ranking Members Cicarella and Rutigliano, and distinguished Members of the General Law Committee. My name is Christine Rutigliano, and I am here in support of House Bill 5434: An Act Concerning the Regulation of Cannabis.

I would like you all to understand that I have never felt so compelled to speak up in favor of any piece of legislation as strongly and vehemently as I have been to support this act, as it is deeply personal. The responsible and thoughtful requirements in this act are just that, responsible. I implore you to pass this act as it is your responsibility to your communities to keep people safe. Contrary to widespread conception, recreational cannabis is NOT without cost and potential for harm. Recreational cannabis in any form has significant potential for grave consequences.

My story is not anything that I could have ever dreamed would become of my family as a result of cannabis. I am like you all, I am your neighbor, I'm a baseball mom, I'm in your car pool, I'm at your community functions and I am the mom of a family stricken by substance abuse. I am YOU. My husband and I work, we have two beautiful children, we have a home and cars, and we have addiction as an added member of our family. I would not wish the hell that cannabis abuse unleashed on my family on my worst enemy.

My husband and I dropped off our handsome, intelligent, bright, mechanical engineering student at UMASS Dartmouth in the fall of 2019. In March of 2020 as the world began to close and combat Covid-19 and UMASS sent students home, a gaunt, 6', 110-pound shell of my son came home from college. My honors student, my baseball player, my pride, and joy had been reduced to someone we didn't know or recognize. As any parent would do, we started searching for answers for his stomach issues, the constant pain, the inability to eat and the malaise that persisted day and night. We went to top facilities in our state, met with the best of the best to aide our son in getting answers and a cure for whatever was ruining his body. Ladies and Gentlemen let me assure you, our lives had been consumed with our sons illness – and we were determined to get to the root cause. Colonoscopies, Endoscopies, Lab work, imaging studies, you name it, we did it. After 13 trips to emergency rooms all over the state, the final diagnosis was something called Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome. Emergency rooms and gastroenterology doctors all over the state have been seeing this syndrome and the damage it does. How do you get this syndrome? Chronic, habitual use of cannabis over a prolonged time. What does CHS look like? Violent, unimaginably painful vomiting that can only be stopped by IV sedation and hydration or by ingesting more cannabis. My son had never had so much as a stitch or a broken bone and now here he is at 19 years old and has 13 ED visits under his belt.

Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome almost ended my son's life on multiple occasions. I can not express the terror and fear I felt watching my son turn blue after violently seizing from overdosing on cannabis and becoming unresponsive in Midstate's emergency room. If it were not for the expertise of the emergency room doctors and nurses, I would not have my son here today. He would be gone, because of Cannabis.

Just as proud as I was to tell people my son was headed to college on a master's track with scholarships in toe, I now exhibit that same pride as I tell you my son is in sober. Michael will battle demons of

addiction every day of his life, but had he not gone through substance abuse rehabilitation which continued in intensive outpatient settings ultimately concluding with lifelong counseling and management, he would be gone, because of Cannabis.

Without the responsible parameters being proposed in the act before you, the risk and likelihood of other families living the nightmare that my family has endured is great. Why would you purposely put families in harms way? The suggestions for action in this proposal make sense, common sense. That is not too much to ask.

Again, as your neighbor, a resident of this great state and parent to two beautiful children, I implore you to look at this bill as a responsibility you have to keep others safe and out of harms way. Your positions are to serve the residents of this state, so do the right thing and pass this legislation so as to not leave us exposed to unregulated cannabis use and abuse. Our lives and the lives of our children depend on your actions to keep people safe.

Thank you for your time.